

BACKGROUND

A pilot project was undertaken during the year 1975/1976 to establish a Belgian-American Ethnic Resource Collection in the Special Collections Department of the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay library. Funding was provided by the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, Wisconsin American Revolution Bicentennial Commission and the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. Manuscript materials are organized and maintained with the assistance of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and collecting efforts will continue in the future.

HISTORY

One of the largest concentrations of Walloon speaking Belgians is found in Northeastern Wisconsin (primarily in Brown, Door and Kewaunee Counties). The major migration period was from 1853 through 1856. While Belgians from both the Flemish and Walloon provinces have settled here, the Walloons have remained a more homogeneous, readily identifiable ethnic group with fourth and fifth generations able to speak the dialect.

Walloon is a French patois which was not a written language in this country. French was used in church records, correspondence, mourning cards, etc.

RESOURCES

The resources of this collection to date focus on the rural Walloon settlement, with a limited amount of Flemish material available.

Oral history tapes and a few narratives on such subjects as folklore, fishing, customs, foods, occupations and the Walloon language have been collected. The tapes are abstracted and a subject index is available.

The iconography collection includes photographs from the past and the present, including documentation of the architecture of the Belgian community. Outdoor ovens and wayside shrines, as well as log buildings have been photographed and supporting information gathered.

Farms owned by Belgians since the 1800's have been mapped and photographed, indicating existing buildings, fields, fences and gardens. Personal interviews reflect changes through time in the farmstead. A more general survey of Belgian architecture was also conducted encompassing over 80 farms.

Monographs and related material such as pamphlets, newspaper articles and maps have been collected. A considerable amount of the material is in French, a phonetic French or Walloon.

Documentation of the Walloon language is available through oral history tapes, dictionaries, grammars, lexicon and serials.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A selected bibliography is available on request, identifying research resources available at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay and elsewhere.

STAFF

The following staff members were involved in the project:

Dorothy Heinrich, Project Director
Lynn McAuley, Principal Investigator
Linda Green, Asst. Investigator
Leigh Krueger, Asst. Investigator
Douglas Pike, Asst. Investigator
Dorothy Metz, Community Volunteer

CONSULTANTS

Kenneth J. Fleurant, Ph.D., Assoc.
Prof. of Humanism and Cultural Change - French
William G. Laatsch, Ph.D., Assoc.
Prof. of Regional Analysis - Cultural Geography.
Donald W. Larmouth, Ph.D., Assoc.
Prof. of Communication-Action - Linguistics.
Jerrold C. Rodesch, Ph.D., Asst.
Prof. of Humanism and Cultural Change - History
Louise R. Witherall, Ph.D., Prof.
of Humanism and Cultural Change - French.
The staff of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.

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The success of the project has been possible because of the assistance and generosity of the Belgian Community.